

**Notice of AGM**  
Details on p.5

# Advocate

Official news magazine of the BC Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM)

Vol. 27 No. 1, Spring 2024

**INTRODUCING  
PHARMACARE &  
DENTAL CARE**

**Getting seniors care  
back on track**



**Why you should  
file your taxes**

# BC FORUM

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## Advocate

The Advocate is published by the BC Federation of Retired Union Members. BC FORUM – supported by WE Consulting and Benefits and affiliated with the BC Federation of Labour – is dedicated to representing the interests of members and their families, continuing into retirement the relationship they enjoyed with the union movement.

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## THE ADVOCATE

# In this edition

Welcome to the first edition of The Advocate for 2024! We are pleased to feature an article from the Hospital Employees Union on the challenges faced by workers in seniors care; we welcome pharmacare and the new Canadian Dental Care Program, and cover how important it is as seniors to file your taxes, in order to benefit from these and other important cost saving programs. Finally, in the Last Word, find out how you can advocate for the things that matter to you.

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We respectfully acknowledge that the BC FORUM office is located on unceded lands of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations.

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# Pharmacare is here, but the fight goes on

By Sam Wiese, BC FORUM President

**P**harmacare!!! We have fought so hard for so long that when I heard the initial words I was exalted, but the wind went out of my sails fast. I know for many reasons I have to take this as a positive. Truthfully, working the bulk of my career with the federal government, I have read numerous pieces of legislation and as a whole C-64 is pretty positive. The key principle we have stood strongly for, that pharmacare needs to be “national, universal and single-payer” is reiterated throughout the legislation. However our expectation that pharmacare be wholly within the parameters of the Canadian Health Act (CHA) have not been met as the legislation states that the Minister must “consider” the CHA when working towards implementation and that pharmacare must be “guided” by the CHA.

There is plenty to do over the next year as the Minister of Health works with stakeholders towards implementation of our national universal pharmacare. Continue to talk to your MLA and B.C. Minister of Health, Adrian Dix about the importance of a national universal single-payer pharmacare, and encourage them to remain supportive of same in dealing with their federal counterparts. Federally, talk to your MP and write Minister of Health Jean-Yves Duclos with entreaties not to fall victim to lobbyists from big pharma and insurance companies. Reinforce the oft stated fact from the Parliamentary Budget Officer that bulk purchasing under a universal pharmacare system is cost effective. And, as ever, when called upon by our affiliates to take positive action, let’s recommit as a whole that BC FORUM is steadfast in our quest to have a Canadian Pharmacare Act that ensures no one will have to forego necessary medicines due to cost.

From a different aspect of pharmaceuticals and drugs, the Canadian



Drug Policy Coalition has launched To End a Crisis: Vision for BC Drug Policy, described as “not just a drug policy platform - it is a call to action”. This Vision was developed by a provincial working group of civil society organizations and people who use drugs. It provides a clear path forward – one beyond the unregulated drug crisis that is now the direct cause of thousands of fatalities every year”.

For those of us who have been affected by “illegal” drug use, an information sheet with links to the full resource paper can be found at: [drugpolicy.ca/visionforbcdrugpolicy/](http://drugpolicy.ca/visionforbcdrugpolicy/)

Back on the federal front, Bill C-58 Anti-Scab legislation passed second reading in the House with the support of all parties. Yes, happily, it received unanimous support on February 27th. The goal now is to ensure that Liberal loopholes and Tory poison pills don’t manage to alter the Bill during committee review.

Anti-scab legislation in federally regulated worksites is part of the confidence-and-supply agreement between the NDP and Liberals. The passage of Bill C-58 will also fulfill a Liberal election promise. Our work is far from done on Bill C-58. In keeping with our

resolution of record, BC FORUM will continue lobbying for Bill C-58 and I know each of you will continue your support with individual efforts.

This spring edition of the Advocate cannot go by without addressing the 2024 BC Budget. Rather than a summary from me, we at The Advocate chose to use the BCFED’s news release to give a brief outline. In addition, the B.C. office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) offers more detailed input and analysis of the 2024 BC Budget available to read and/or listen to at: [www.policynote.ca/2024-bc-budget/](http://www.policynote.ca/2024-bc-budget/)

We are also republishing the BCFED’s news release announcing the release of the CCPA publication “Connecting BC: A 10 year vision for public transit throughout BC”. BC FORUM provided input to this report via the BC FED and through our continued working relationship with the Save Our HandyDART coalition. I am pleased to say that this is the first comprehensive report on public transit that I have read in quite a while which addresses transit issues outside of the Lower Mainland. Kudos to all who worked on this project, in particular to author, Marc Lee.

Precarious housing and homelessness is an issue that we featured in our last edition of The Advocate. Budget 2024 carries on the initiatives already in place. We know that homes aren’t going to magically appear overnight but are optimistic when we see projects start such as the one in North Vancouver which will see 86 affordable homes for independent seniors, individuals and families with low to moderate incomes.

“This project provides much-needed affordable homes on the North Shore so seniors can age in place and families can raise their children in the

(cont. on page 14)



## New report sets out bold 10-year plan for integrated public transit in B.C.

*The following is a news release from the BCFED, issued February 16, 2024.*

Within the next decade, British Columbia's local transit systems could be united into an upgraded province-wide public transit network, offering safe, reliable, affordable service for riders travelling within and between communities throughout the province.

That's the vision set out in Connecting BC, a new report released today by the BC Federation of Labour (BCFED) and the B.C. office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA-BC). It's a comprehensive plan for investing in buses, rail, rapid transit and passenger ferries.

"No matter where you live in B.C., you should be able to get where you need to go quickly, safely and affordably. And by meeting that need, we can confront some of the most critical challenges working people are facing, like affordability, housing and the climate crisis," said BCFED president Sussanne Skidmore.

"After years of neglect and privatization, B.C.'s transit system is plagued with overcrowding, delays and big gaps in service," said report author Marc Lee, a CCPA-BC senior economist.

"Our current provincial government has made important new transit investments, and now it's time for the next step: a province-wide vision, uniting local and regional transit into an integrated whole."

The report lays out a 10-year program of investment, with a call for immediate action on three key priorities:

- an inter-community express bus service connecting B.C. communi-



©Government of British Columbia



Marc Lee ©CCPA

ties that were left stranded by the end of BC Rail passenger service and the departure of Greyhound.

- eliminating privatization throughout B.C.'s public transit systems to ensure better, more reliable services for riders, and fairer benefits and wages for transit workers.
- extending the provincial government's free transit program to cover all British Columbians 18 and younger.

In the longer term, the plan includes a dramatic expansion and electrification of BC Transit's bus and HandyDART fleet, new regional

rail and passenger ferry connections, accelerating Metro Vancouver's transit plans and integrating transit systems to allow seamless travel throughout B.C.

The plan would mean approximately 16,800 direct and spinoff jobs per year from construction, and 23,700 direct and spinoff jobs from ongoing operations. Much of the plan's costs would be recovered from economic growth and revenue generated through

increased density near new and expanded transit hubs.

B.C.'s economy would also see a boost from reductions in traffic congestion, while employers and employees alike would benefit from shorter, more reliable commutes. Communities would see cleaner air and less sprawl, and B.C. would make crucial progress toward the province's climate reduction targets.

Stronger transit connections across B.C. would also have a big impact on tourism and lead to a cleaner province, making a central contribution to dramatically reducing the one-third of B.C.'s greenhouse gas emissions that come from transportation.

As well, affordable, viable transit options would allow many B.C. families to save on vehicle costs — with annual savings potentially reaching \$10,000 for those choosing to quit driving altogether.

Connecting B.C. is part of the BCFED's Climate Justice and Jobs Plan for BC, currently under development in consultation with unions, working people and communities throughout B.C. The full report and additional quotes are available at [bcfed.ca/connecting-bc](https://bcfed.ca/connecting-bc) or [policyalternatives.ca/connecting-bc](https://policyalternatives.ca/connecting-bc)

# B.C. budget helps working families close the gap by lowering costs. Let's help raise wages, too

The following is a news release from the BCFED, issued February 22, 2024.

**T**oday's provincial budget will provide welcome relief for working families struggling with rising costs, the BC Federation of Labour (BCFED) said today.

BCFED president Sussanne Skidmore said the budget continues to invest in critical services like health care, education and seniors supports, demonstrating that the government has been listening closely to what the public needs. "Now is not the time for cuts and belt-tightening. We're happy to see this government is investing in people," said Skidmore.

The new BC Builds program will quickly create new homes targeted to working people, she said. "BC Builds is a good start for creating more affordable homes so workers can stay in their communities," said Skidmore.



Sussanne Skidmore, BCFED President ©BCFED

While measures like the temporary increase to the BC Family Benefit and the new one-time BC Electricity Affordability Credit will help, the BCFED said working people need more long-term relief. "The government is on the right track by tackling afford-

ability, as working people struggle with rising costs for necessities like groceries and housing. B.C.'s lowest-paid workers need to see real wage increases and a reduction in their household costs," said Skidmore.

The government can take steps to immediately improve affordability for families, said BCFED secretary-treasurer Hermender Singh Kailley. "We need to close the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage. We can start by implementing a pay equity strategy to end pay discrimination, which will boost earnings for many of B.C.'s lowest-paid workers."

The budget includes a modest increase in funding for the Employment Standards Branch. "We think the government should seize an opportunity to reimagine the Employment Standards Branch and the way it delivers services to working people," said Skidmore. "Complaints need to be addressed faster to get owed wages back into workers' pockets, and the branch must engage in proactive strategies that prevent violations in the first place."

"We are pleased to see continued investments to build required capital infrastructure to meet the needs of our growing communities," said Skidmore. She pointed to the public transit plan released last Friday by the BCFED and the B.C. Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives as another opportunity for capital investment that would help businesses and workers. "Building great public transit provides an economic boost while saving families a lot of money, and creating thousands of great, well-paying jobs," she said.

Find more BCFED news releases at <https://bcfed.ca/news>

## SAVE THE DATE

BC FORUM is inviting members to the  
**2024 Annual General Meeting.**

Please hold **June 19, 2024** in your calendars.

Location is still to be determined.

Stay tuned for details as they become available, and check for updates on our website at [bcforum.ca](http://bcforum.ca) and our Facebook page at [facebook.com/BCRetiredUnionMembersForum](https://facebook.com/BCRetiredUnionMembersForum)



## WE'VE MOVED

**110-4295 Canada Way,  
Burnaby, BC V5G 1H1**

After a long wait, BC FORUM finally has a new office! We hope to be ready to serve BC FORUM members in the new space by Jan 1, 2024. In the meantime, we ask for your continued patience as we move in.



# From the Office of the Seniors Advocate

The following are a few highlights of news from the B.C. Seniors Advocate, Dan Levitt. For full details search Seniors Advocate – Government of British Columbia ([seniorsadvocatebc.ca](https://seniorsadvocatebc.ca)) and look up Newsletters

## Province names new seniors advocate:

The Province has appointed Dan Levitt as the new seniors advocate for British Columbia as government continues to support oversight and advocacy toward seniors care and the programs and services seniors need.

“Dan Levitt has championed the rights of seniors for 30 years and with his extensive experience he is an excellent choice for B.C.’s seniors advocate,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “Isobel Mackenzie became the first seniors advocate in Canada and we thank her for being a powerful, impactful voice. With Mr. Levitt, government will continue to work collaboratively to help seniors throughout the province to live their healthiest, happiest lives.”

## Current Issues and Resources

**Tax Filing** - It is more important than ever to file an income tax return, even if you don’t owe any money. Your eligibility for many important government supports, such as the new Canadian Dental Plan and Guaranteed Income Supplement, are based on your annual income tax return.

## Forward with Dementia: Culturally-Specific Dementia Resources

Free, downloadable resources for people with dementia, care partners and health care providers that have been developed specifically for different cultural communities are now available on the Forward with Dementia website. These new



brochures, Q&As and other materials are available in English, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Italian, and Punjabi, with French coming soon. To learn more go to [forwardwithdementia.ca/news/category-news/](https://forwardwithdementia.ca/news/category-news/)

## Landmark Study, Volume 2: The Many Faces of Dementia in Canada

Dementia is a major public health problem in Canada and around the world, affecting millions of people. Research indicates significant variations in the risk of development, prevalence, clinical presentation, and health outcomes across various communities in Canada, including differences in ethnicity, race, sex, gender and age. The study is available at: [alzheimer.ca/en/the-many-faces-of-dementia-in-canada-landmark-study-volume-2](https://alzheimer.ca/en/the-many-faces-of-dementia-in-canada-landmark-study-volume-2)

## Perspectives on Growing Older in Canada: The 2023 NIA Ageing in Canada Survey

The 2023 NIA (National Institute on Ageing) Ageing in Canada Survey report by the NIA, in partnership with the Environics Institute for Survey

Research, takes an in-depth look at the perspectives of growing older in Canada using a base sample of 5,875 Canadians. The survey is the largest of its kind in Canada and provides the first follow-up look at the perspectives and experiences of Canadians 50 and older across three key dimensions of ageing well —

social well-being, financial security, and health and independence — since its inaugural launch last year. For more information and to read the report, go to [www.niageing.ca/2023-annual-survey](https://www.niageing.ca/2023-annual-survey)

## Free Peer Support Training

The B.C. Jewish Seniors Alliance is offering free training for seniors interested in becoming Senior Peer Support Volunteers. Once training is complete, volunteers offer friendly phone calls and home visits, bereavement support and accompaniment to appointments for other seniors. To learn more go to: [jsalliance.org/peer-support-2/](https://jsalliance.org/peer-support-2/)

## Resourceful and Resilient: Challenges Facing B.C.’s Rural Seniors

On February 15, Isobel Mackenzie released her report Resourceful and Resilient: Challenges Facing B.C.’s Rural Seniors

You can read the full report at Resourceful and Resilient: Challenges Facing B.C.’s Rural Seniors – Seniors Advocate ([seniorsadvocatebc.ca](https://seniorsadvocatebc.ca))

Highlights from the report include:

- Seniors are 25% of B.C.’s rural

population compared to urban B.C. where seniors are 19% of the population;

- The seniors' population in rural B.C. is growing faster than urban B.C. and by 2032, seniors will be 29% of the population of rural B.C. compared to 21% in urban B.C.;
- Seniors in communities in the Northern, Interior and Vancouver Island health authorities have a lower life expectancy compared to those in Vancouver Coastal and Fraser health authorities where more of the population is concentrated in urban centres;
- 17% of rural seniors do not have a family doctor or nurse practitioner compared to 13% of urban seniors, and hours and days of access to a clinic in rural communities are

more limited compared to those in urban centers;

- 51% of seniors in rural B.C. communities are married, compared to 63% in urban areas with single seniors more likely to need home support, assisted living and long-term care;
- Rural seniors have both lower average and median incomes than their urban counterparts and their overall wealth is estimated to be two thirds less;
- The rate of acute care beds per 1,000 population is 70% lower in rural B.C. and the average length of stay as an alternative level of care (ALC) patient is 27% higher (85% of ALC patients are 65+);

The report makes seven recommendations:

1. Develop and Implement a Rural Seniors Housing Strategy
2. Develop and Implement a Rural Health Human Resource Strategy
3. Develop and Implement Rural Seniors Home and Community Care Strategy
4. Develop and Implement a Provincial Long-Term Care and Assisted Living Plan Based on Equity Throughout the Province
5. Develop and Implement a Provincial Rural Transportation Strategy
6. Improve and Better Promote both the Provincial Travel Assistance Program (TAP) and Hope Air
7. Increase Rural Representation in Government through the creation of a Ministry or Minister of State for Rural B.C.



## RETIRE BETTER WORK UNION

Retirees are the foundation of everything we do.

# FEEL THE POWER





# Getting seniors' care back on track starts with workers

by Elaine Littmann, HEU

**T**he seniors' care landscape has endured waves of change over the last 20 years, and care aide Jennifer Reitan has had a front row seat since 1997.

That's when she left her first job at Lions Gate Hospital and moved to Castlegar, a town of 8,000 set among the powerful rivers and rugged mountains of southeastern B.C.

Her new employer was and still is a privately operated facility. But in the 1990s, almost all long-term care sites that received public funding were covered under a single collective agreement, and owners were affiliated with the Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC).

So, when Reitan started her job in the Interior, she was covered by the Facilities Bargaining Association (FBA) contract, with the same wages, benefits, pension and working conditions as care aides at public hospitals.

This "master agreement" was an achievement HEU had bargained hard for. It created more fairness and stability for workers, but it also meant health authorities had more direct oversight of standards and conditions of care.

Then in 2001, the B.C. Liberal government was elected, and with them came their relentless drive to privatize.

They passed new laws that removed contracting-out protections that were in the HEU contract since the 1960s, and eliminated employment security language for health care workers.

The BC Liberals also allowed seniors' care operators like Reitan's to opt out of membership in the HEABC, but keep receiving public funding.

An estimated 8,000 HEU members were fired in the first five years, as health authorities and long-term care

operators privatized a long list of health services, and a raft of new private operators entered the sector.

Workers who were hired back by private contractors took an overnight pay cut of up to 50 per cent. And they no longer had a union.

HEU scrambled to re-organize the workers, but each deal was an individual, hard-won agreement with a single contractor. There was no way to get the contracted workers back under the master agreement.

Jennifer Reitan, now an occupational health and safety steward at her local, has represented members on the bargaining committee.

She says that when her employer withdrew from the HEABC, "we got pulled out of the municipal pension plan immediately. And when we went to bargain a new contract, the employer suddenly told us they were operating at a loss, and we had to take cuts.

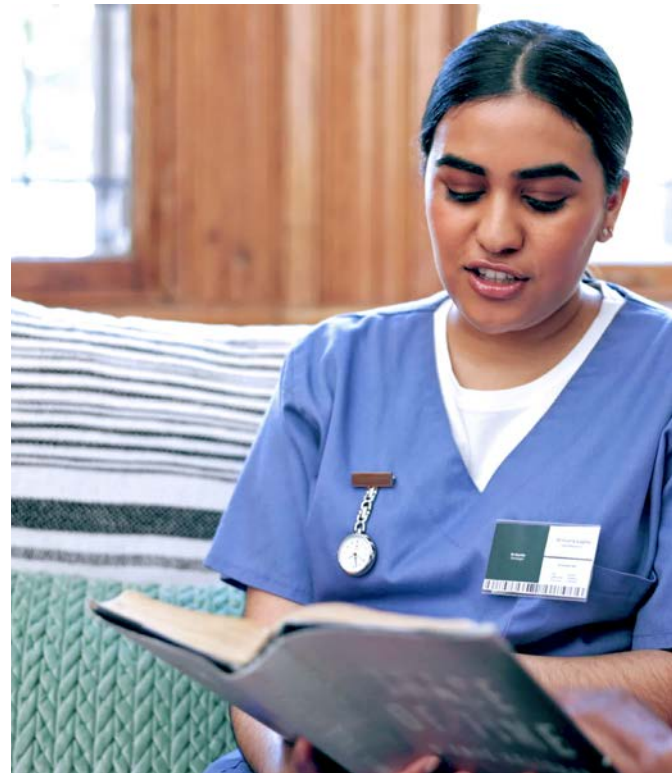
"But we couldn't afford to lose it all from our wages. So, we also took less holidays, less sick time, a different benefit package."

Once her workplace was removed from the FBA agreement, she says, her sense of connection with other long-term care facilities slipped away.

And without the direct administration of the health authority, Reitan felt there wasn't much oversight for her small care home in the Kootenays.

"We all just went under the radar, I guess. It felt like we were just part of a whole bunch of little facilities."

Within a decade, the seniors' care sector was utterly fragmented.



Wages for care aides varied by as much as \$7 an hour, standards of care were hard to measure, and there seemed to be no clear system in place to track the public money given to private companies – how much they spent on care, and how much they took as profit.

When the BC NDP regained power in 2017, they restored succession rights to health care workers, and repealed the Liberal legislation that allowed workers to be fired when operators switched contractors.

This brought some stability to the sector for workers, but did not address the deterioration and disparity in care and working conditions created by 16 years of privatization.

In a series of reports, the B.C. Office of the Seniors Advocate found that for-profit operators were spending far less on frontline staff and delivering fewer hours of care than their not-for-profit counterparts.





Meena Brisard ©HEU

A 2021 report linked lack of paid sick leave and the contracting out of care staff to some of the largest COVID-19 outbreaks in B.C.'s long-term care and assisted living homes.

The pandemic also accelerated a staffing crisis that had been gathering steam.

"Before the pandemic," Reitan says, "we were still managing. If you've only worked in a private facility, you just

accept the conditions, the struggles you have with equipment, and wages.

"But if you also work at Interior Health, you see the differences.

"When COVID hit, it was eye-opening to see all those people that left private facilities or chose to work ... [in an] Interior Health site. We never got those people back."

The wage-levelling program the B.C. government introduced during the pandemic subsidized private facilities so they could maintain staffing levels.

But wage subsidies still didn't put workers in private sites on par with comparable FBA jobs – they still fell short on benefits, pension, vacation, and shift differentials.

And in the just-released 2023 Seniors Advocate report, research shows what many had suspected. Private and non-profit care homes are delivering less care than public facilities, while reaping more profit than ever.

"This study shows that contracted care home operators – and especially for-profit operators – are diverting public funds away from the frontline to their bottom line," says HEU secretary-business manager Meena Brisard.

This is no surprise to workers in the sector – or to experts skeptical of the claim that private companies can deliver cheaper care to the same standard as public services.

Donna Baines, a researcher at UBC, says privatization is often linked to an "austerity" agenda, where some governments call for cost-cutting measures and blame economic woes on "big government" and public spending.

"There is rarely evidence to show health care privatization does what it claims. It doesn't save costs, it's not more efficient, it doesn't deliver better services. But politicians just keep going back to it," says Baines.

"During COVID, polls showed that two-thirds of Canadians supported

moving long-term care back to the public sector. The

COVID outcomes in Ontario for seniors were the worst in Canada, and feelings were high that private facilities were failing. And yet right now, Ontario is making huge moves towards privatization," she says.

In B.C., Brisard says it's time to reverse that trend, starting with re-establishing a level playing field for seniors' care.

"A good start would be the implementation of the BC NDP's 2020 election promise to restore the standard wages, benefits and working conditions dismantled by the previous B.C. Liberal government."

As for Reitan, she loves her job and her co-workers. And she wants to make sure she is delivering the best resident-centred care possible.

She hopes it can improve, but fears the staffing crisis will have a negative impact on care over the long term.

When asked about the biggest change she's seen over her career, Reitan doesn't hesitate.

For herself, "it's the unknown future. Where am I going to be next year? And my physical and mental well-being, doing this work."

Despite the challenges, Reitan wants to keep on doing the meaningful and essential work she fell in love with almost 30 years ago.

"That's why I'm so passionate about HEU's Care Can't Wait campaign. Because I feel like if there's something that I can do to benefit the private facilities out there, then I want to do it."

*The Hospital Employees' Union is the biggest health care union in B.C., with more than 50,000 members. HEU locals protect members working in every area of health care, all across B.C.*



## DENTAL CARE

# Dental care, the first steps in the process

The following is an excerpt from a letter to the constituents of Burnaby-New Westminster from NDP MP Peter Julian

**T**he NDP Dental Care Program is an historic and important step toward the universal health coverage that Canadians need. Because of this program, no one will have to miss going to the dentist because it's too expensive

Last year, we announced the beginning of the NDP Dental Care Plan, which will start to roll out later this year. I, along with my NDP caucus colleagues and our teams, have worked tirelessly to ensure the government makes this process as smooth as possible.

### Eligibility criteria:

- No access to employer/pension-sponsored/private dental insurance.



©Office of Peter Julian

- Have an annual adjusted family net income under \$90,000.
- Be a Canadian resident for tax purposes; and
- Have filed their tax return in the previous year.

- Canadian residents who have access to dental benefits through provincial, territorial and federal social programs who meet the Canadian Dental Care Program eligibility criteria will be able to apply to the program. Benefits will be coordinated to ensure no duplication of coverage.

### Phased applications:

- Seniors aged 70+ will begin receiving a letter inviting them to apply by phone December 2023 - March 2024, in sequence based on age:
- 87+: Letters sent December 2023
- 77-86: Letters sent January 2024
- 72-76: February 2024
- 70-71: March 2024
- Seniors aged 65-69 will be able to apply online starting in May 2024.

## UNITED STEELWORKERS SOAR STEELWORKERS ORGANIZATION OF ACTIVE RETIREES

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### What do we do?

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Yes, if you can agree with and support the guiding principles and programs of SOAR. Annual dues are reasonable at \$12 for individual membership and \$15 for a couple.

### Ready to join?

Contact District 3 SOAR Coordinator Brian Harder at 604-341-6382 or visit [usw.ca/soar](http://usw.ca/soar).



# A fond farewell to John

By Sam Wiese, BC FORUM President

- People with disabilities and children under 18 will be able to apply online in June 2024.
- Applications for all remaining eligible Canadian residents should start by 2025.

## Roll out:

Once enrolled, Canadian residents who qualify will be sent a welcome package by Sun Life with a member card and the start date for when their oral health dental care services will start. The earliest coverage start day will be May 1st, 2024.

Getting more Canadians to the dentist, free of charge, will make life more affordable for families and keep everyone healthier. With the NDP, you pay less and get more.

At the close of our February 20th Board of Directors meeting John Savage announced that he was taking the final step into retirement and resigning his position of director for Unifor.

John has been an actively involved member of the board for over 15 years. Always with a positive attitude John held his position on your board as an honour. He would willingly lend a hand staffing the BC FORUM booth whenever he was available and you could be assured that he would provide knowledgeable input during any debate.

While John leaves his position on the Board of Directors, he is intent on remaining an active BC FORUM member, indeed, as a parting gift he

wrote out some ideas on how to keep BC FORUM relevant and sustainable into the future.

Our sincerest thanks for all John has done for us. To his family and other friends who unselfishly allowed us to dominate so much of his time, we truly do appreciate it.

I know I'll see you at some worthy event, so, not goodbye, but...catch you later, Brother!

*Thank you!*

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# Importance of timely taxes for seniors

By Marion Pollack, BC FORUM Director

**T**his year it is more important than ever that retirees/seniors file our 2023 income taxes. Many federal and provincial income benefits are tied into filing income tax. Provincially this includes:

- Fair PharmaCare (which assists British Columbians with the cost of prescription drugs).
- SAFER, the Shelter Allowance for Elderly Renters (which assists some low to moderate income renters with the cost of their rent).
- The BC Seniors Bus Pass (which assists seniors primarily receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement with the cost of bus transportation).

Federally this includes:

- The Guaranteed Income Supplement or GIS (which keeps very



low income seniors out of extreme poverty. Over 22% of seniors in B.C. receive the GIS).

- The new Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP)

In 2024, the CDCP is being rolled out to people who are 65 years of age and older. This plan will help seniors take care of our oral health and is very needed. There are several criteria to be eligible for this new dental plan

and one is that you filed your previous year income tax. You will need to continue to file income tax every year to maintain your eligibility to this needed plan.

## Help with your income tax?

Many community agencies including seniors centres run free income tax clinics. They are for retirees/seniors of modest income, face housing insecurity, or are newcomers to Canada.

To get more information and to find a free community based income tax clinic near you go to: [www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/community-volunteer-income-tax-program](https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/community-volunteer-income-tax-program).

*Marion represents the Canadian Union of Postal Workers on the BC FORUM Board of Directors.*

# Taxes for seniors, a personal story

By Gwenne Farrell, BC FORUM 2nd VP

**I**n April of 2020 when we were all being asked to stay within a small bubble of in person contacts I became a volunteer for Brella Community Services (formerly known as Seniors Come Share Society). My first role as a volunteer was to once a week phone isolated seniors to see if they needed any additional support. I learned that they didn't really need more support, they just needed someone to talk to. Doing this was very fulfilling for me as I knew I was helping people.

Then in January 2021 the Brella Volunteer Coordinator asked for people willing to be part of the Community Volunteer Income Tax Clinic (CVITC) which provides free income tax preparation for, in particular, low income seniors. Given I had been doing taxes for family and friends for more than two decades, this was a no brainer for me so I immediately signed up.



©Gwenne Farrell

This year will mark my fourth year doing the CVITC. Brella made it easy by providing the option of preparing the seniors' income tax virtually from my home. As part of this process I have been through a criminal record check and had to be approved by the Canada Revenue Agency. The process includes very strict rules to protect confidentiality and to ensure no personal

information is kept once the taxes have been filed electronically.

I keep returning to volunteer for the CVITC (even though since I initially stepped forward my life is much busier) because of what I have seen through this program. There are times when my heart breaks recognizing how little some of these clients manage to survive on. I personally cannot imagine how in such an expensive area like Metro Vancouver they are able to sustain themselves, but they do. I also keep coming back to do this because of the amount of appreciation that I receive from these clients. Some have even started requesting me personally when they book their appointment for tax preparation.

The CVITC only requires me to volunteer four hours a week for the months of March and April each year but I know those few hours make a difference to those who need it.

# From the federal Minister for Seniors

*The following are highlights from the federal Minister for Seniors. To get the full information go to Employment and Social Development Canada and search Updates from the Minister for Seniors*

## Health and Wellness

February 5 to 11 marked White Cane Week, a time to help raise public awareness of the challenges facing Canadians living with vision loss. As we get older, it's normal for our vision to change. To learn about the steps you can take to preserve your eyesight and vision, visit the Seniors and Aging - Vision Care webpage.

## Romance scams

Don't fall for scams! The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre is noticing a combination of romance and investment

scams. In these scams, victims are contacted on dating apps or social media by a fraudster who is attempting to develop a relationship with them to gain their trust and affection.

We encourage you to visit the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre's webpage on romance scams to learn more about what red flags to look for.

## Travelling this winter?

Did you know you can visit the Older travellers webpage for information to help you have safe and healthy travels this winter? It has a wealth of useful information, including advice and tips for older travellers. If you are visiting Canada and arriving at one of the main airports, you can complete your customs and immigration declaration at a kiosk or eGate upon arrival.

Save time and submit an Advance Declaration up to 72 hours before you arrive in Canada. When you use this feature, you can benefit from special access to express lanes in the arrivals hall.

To submit an Advance Declaration, you will first need to access the Arrive-CAN app and create your account.

## Fraud prevention: Be extra vigilant!

Service Canada is aware of scams targeting Canadians related to the Canadian Dental Care Plan. Service Canada usually sends mail in beige or white envelopes with the official Canada wordmark. If you are concerned about the legitimacy of a

(cont. on next page)



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## ADVOCACY

(cont. from previous page)

letter you received regarding the Canadian Dental Care Plan, you can contact Service Canada at 1-833-537-4342 (TTY: 1-833-677-6262).

### Canadian Dental Care Plan

As we continue to roll out the Canadian Dental Care Plan, I am happy to share with you that Service Canada has approved over 400,000 applications since mid-December 2023. I want to take a moment to remind Canadians that this is the largest rollout of any benefit in Canadian history. We're averaging about 20,000 new individuals signing up each and every day, and we've sent out about half of the 4.1 million letters inviting seniors to apply. With that, I want to thank Canadians for embracing the phased approach.

Each month, Service Canada will contact another new group of seniors, based on age. Applications remain open for those 77 years or older, and we are expanding the rollout to more seniors this month. That means potentially eligible seniors aged 72 to 76 will start receiving letters inviting them to apply to the Canadian Dental Care Plan, with instructions on how to validate their eligibility and apply to the plan by phone.

If you have already received your letter, you can apply now! Call Service Canada and apply via the automated interactive voice response system.


We encourage you to share this information with your friends, family and other older adults in your life.

For more details, including eligibility, services covered, and the phased rollout, visit the Government of Canada's Dental Coverage web page.

(cont. from page 3)

North Shore community they know and love," said Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing. "This is our Homes for People action plan at work, creating the types of housing options we need, so everyone can find a home that suits their need."

Provincially, things are starting to build up, and not just with housing. We all know that this is an election year in B.C. We are going to see and hear more from the Liberals, rebranded as the BC United, and the provincial Conservatives. You're also going to hear more from our current government, all with the intent of receiving your vote. What I would ask of everyone is to get involved in the discussion, take the time to become informed as to what each party envisions for B.C., then join in or start the discussion and maybe even



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The Advocate, Spring 2024 – 15

# Talking politics is finding your voice

By Sam Wiese, BC FORUM President

It's an election year here in B.C. and if you were raised anything like me your parents cautioned you about two things never to discuss – religion and politics. While I can acquiesce on the first point, I have never understood the logic in the second, not talking about politics.

Talking about politics can be tricky. How do you handle that relative who continuously sends you emails and texts exaggerating information about a party to the point where it becomes “fake news”? Do you keep quiet when your views on an issue are in complete opposition of those of family and friends? Do you quickly adjust the topic of conversation or remain silent to avoid causing dissention?

While it may seem a bit daunting to “talk politics”, all it really entails is talking about life. It's a willingness to talk about the things that affect each and every one of us on a daily basis. It can be as basic as tasking a young family member with making a plan with their friends to get out and vote, or delving into party platforms and then analyzing them to determine the immediate and long-term effect each would have on your community. It may seem daunting at first, so I am hoping that you will find these few tips I have learned over decades of encouraging “member-to-member” political engagement helpful enough to use and share with others.

Talk in person. A colleague posted a political meme that you find offensive. You might be tempted to call them out by commenting on the post. Instead, have the conversation face-to-face—or at least offline. You'll both be less likely to insult each other this way. There's something about seeing a person's face that reminds you that they are an actual person.



Ask questions. Rather than simply stating something like, “The government needs to do more about climate change.” Show interest and start open debate by asking, “What do you think should be done to protect our planet for the future?” By engaging instead of lecturing, everyone involved in the conversation (and those listening in) may learn something.

Adjust your perspective. It's unlikely that you are going to change someone's mind, or vice versa. Instead, alter your goal to understanding their point of view and hopefully they will do likewise.

Find common ground. Even if you are on opposite ends of the political spectrum, there's often at least one thing you can agree on. Discovering what that is and noting it during the conversation can help make politics feel less divisive.

Know when to end it. If the person you're talking with offends you or if you feel like you can't respond respectfully, call it quits.

Walk away when it's not worth it. We can't politely engage in political debate when it's being used as a guise for extreme bias or bigotry. In any situation which you are made to feel unsafe or invalidated, walk away. There's a difference between having a political debate and being attacked.

Go vote! This is the easiest talking point when talking politics; discussing your intent to vote on or before October 19, 2024 and challenging everyone to do the same. Emphasize that a mark on that ballot is their voice being spoken, that by exercising this right they are speaking the last word in the debate which is this election cycle.

## New address? New e-mail address?

Please send your new address and e-mail address to BC FORUM. You can mail in the form on page 15, or you can reach us by telephone at 1.800.896.5678 (toll free) or 604.688.4565; or by email at [bcforum@bcfed.ca](mailto:bcforum@bcfed.ca).



Please check the expiry date on your label. Is your membership due for renewal?